

**TABLE 1 – PUBLICITY 101: HOW TO GET YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN THE NEWS**

## Getting Attention

In their path-breaking book, *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*, Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer aptly describe the challenges for businesses in a marketplace overflowing with information. *“What is tough to find...is enough time to use all that information. Meet the real, increasingly scarce resource: attention.”* They go on to state that *“return on attention will become as carefully measured as ROE was in its time.”*

It is getting more difficult for individuals and organizations to get attention as the sheer volume of information now available to virtually every American has increased substantially. There are ways, however, to significantly improve your chances. A few ideas are offered below.

Don't assume that others will find your issue or product as exciting as you do, and don't assume that your level of excitement and energy are contagious. With most reporters, it won't be.

Focus on what a reporter needs. Here are a few basics.

- **A good story** means actually having a story to tell (as opposed to a set of facts or list of needs) that average readers/viewers will find interesting. If you can't keep your neighbor or high school child interested, you may not have much of a story.
- **Key messages** have to be worked out before the interview. Don't ever assume (even if it's true) that you are so good on your feet that you do not need to have a fine-tuned set of messages (no more than three) that you want to convey. Always come back to one or more of those messages in every answer you give.
- **Personalities** that average readers/viewers can easily identify with can make your issue more interesting to reporters and editors. Use people's lives to make or convey your points, it's much more interesting than reading facts and statistics.
- **Facts and statistics** can be very compelling to a reporter (although less so for most readers/viewers). Use facts and statistics to support (but not to make) your point. Use them to help prove that your story is important, but don't make the mistake of thinking that great statistics make for a great story. In most cases, they will not be enough. People remember stories much longer than they remember charts, graphs and percentages.
- **Trends** will help sell your story. Try to link what you are doing to regional or national trends, especially if those trends are the subject of current press coverage. It will give your story longer legs and it will elevate its importance in the eyes of most reporters and editors. If you read/see a news story on the trend, call that reporter with your story – but you have to be explicit (and quick) about making the connection.
- **Breaking news** is always a big draw for reporters. Is there something in your story that is new, timely or that will “break” in the near future? If so, use that to your advantage when you make your pitch.
- **Exclusive news** is also very compelling to most reporters. They all want to be first with the news, before their competition. Newspapers want to beat each other in addition to local television and radio outlets, and vice versa. Online news outlets have added another

dimension. You need to be careful playing one off the other, but I've placed many stories using the "exclusive" approach.

- **Human interest stories** are a staple of almost all news operations. Try weaving your issue around a compelling human interest story. If someone gets rich, gets well, gets married, gets arrested, gets famous or (sadly) gets killed, you may have a news hook.
- **The "public interest"** still holds some value in news organizations, so if you can demonstrate that your story or issue has a direct (i.e., health or pocketbook related) and obvious link to the interests of the general public, you might find a more receptive ear.
- **Dignitaries and VIPs** can raise the news value of your story if they are involved. Known names in the entertainment industry are perhaps the most valuable, followed by sports figures, and somewhere near the bottom of the list you'll find politicians of occasional value.
- **Staging an event** can attract interest simply as a result of the fanfare and number of people involved. If the general public can (and would want to) attend, that can be a great news hook to get coverage in advance. Combining other elements of this "basics" list (i.e. VIPs, great visuals, human interest) will enhance your prospects even more.
- **Great visuals** may be the most important single issue, second only to a good story line. While it obviously applies most directly to television, all news organizations can make good use of exciting or unusual visual images.
- **Distinctly local stories** are always appreciated, although they may not make page one. The smaller the news market the more likely you will find a positive reception. Even so, you will want to have other story elements from this list to enhance your chances.
- **Effective press materials** always help. A simple fact sheet with the basics clearly laid out will save you time and let you focus on key messages. A nicely crafted press release (that incorporates elements from this list) will also help by laying out the traditional who, what, when, where, why and how. Get to the point in the first sentence.
- **Media training** can make a huge difference in your (or in your spokesperson's) performance. The goal of this training is to improve your ability to respond to tough questions and to stay on point in terms of key messages. Make sure you get training from someone who has journalism in their background. Simply practicing in front of a video camera is not real media training.
- **Get professional public relations help** from an agency in your area. They have the media lists and relationships with reporters and news organizations that can give you a wonderful edge. Agree on the scope of work and the price and then keep them accountable for real results. The more money you have to spend, the more agency attention you will get. Smaller agencies are usually hungrier and therefore willing to take on smaller accounts.

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